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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002473

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MOI TO HIRE 500 CHRISTIANS AND MANDEANS TO GUARD
RELIGIOUS SITES

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1891
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1988

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In response to requests from the non-Muslim Endowment and the bombings of six churches in Baghdad on July 12, the GOI has authorized the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to hire, train and pay 500 guards drawn from Iraq's Christians and Sabeen-Mandean communities to serve as guards at churches and other places of worship. The additional hires will nearly triple the total number of guards serving at minority religious sites from 300 to 800 although the Christian community is having difficulties locating enough able bodied individuals to fill the positions. As of September 10, 300 names had been submitted to MOI for vetting and the first cadre of minority guards is already receiving basic weapons training. END SUMMARY.

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500 New Guards Authorized After Church Bombings

[1](#)2. (C) On July 12, six churches in Baghdad were bombed in a coordinated series of attacks that left two killed and at least 20 wounded (ref A). In the aftermath of the attacks, the head of the Christian Endowment, Ra'ad al-Shammaa, blamed the GOI for failing to provide adequate security at churches and reiterated a request for 500 additional guards that the non-Muslim Endowment had supposedly submitted to the Council of Ministers many months prior. In response, the PM's advisor for Christian affairs, Georges Bakoos, blamed the Endowment for failing to bring the request to his personal attention so that he could ensure that there was follow-through (ref B). On September 3, the head of the non-Muslim Endowment, Abdullah al-Naufali, confirmed to Poloff that the GOI had authorized the Endowment's request for 500 additional guards to be drawn from Iraq's minority communities and to be placed at places of worship. He added that 16 MOI personnel had also been assigned as bodyguards for prominent Christian religious leaders. In a separate meeting on September 6, the Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Selim, confirmed the MOI's intentions to hire minority guards.

Minority Guard Force Takes Shape

[1](#)3. (C) According to MOI senior advisor Rafae Munahe, the MOI currently employs 300 guards for minority religious sites. Al-Naufali stated that in the week of August 30 the non-Muslim Endowment submitted the first 300 names to the MOI for initial screening and vetting. He said that the 300 names included 240 Christians and 60 Mandeans. He stated that all of the new guards will be on the MOI payroll and that the MOI had final decision-making authority over how to deploy the new guards, but said that decisions would be made with the input of the non-Muslim Endowment. In fact, he

noted, that the MOI has already placed two of its commanders at the non-Muslim Endowment offices to supervise the new guards. Al-Naufali stated that the minority guards would be affiliated with the Facilities Protection Service (FPS) division of MOI rather than serve as regular police and that their purpose will be to guard religious places of worship in Baghdad including approximately 70 Christian churches and monasteries. Separately, on September 9, Christian MP Yonadam Kanna told Poloff that he was pressing the MOI to hire the new personnel as full fledged Iraqi police so that they will receive the same salaries and benefits as other MOI employees.
Qemployees.

The Recruitment Process

14. (C) Al-Naufali stated that the non-Muslim Endowment had asked individual churches and Mandaean temples to recommend people with the idea of creating a guard force that knew its local environment extremely well. Christian Baghdad Provincial Council representative Gorguis Barwary told Poloff on September 9 that the MOI will not hire anyone for this program without a letter of recommendation from a church. Al-Naufali noted that the initial recruitment of minority guards has faced a hurdle because the MOI only wanted to hire people between the ages of 19-35. He admitted that this was a problem as so far there were not enough young men within the Christian community willing to serve as guards. Al-Naufali said that a better recruitment campaign would be needed within the churches and that the Endowment may look to recruit Christian women just as the Mandaean community had

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done.

Training

15. (C) Al-Naufali said no official schedule has been worked out with the MOI to put the new recruits through formal training. However, the MOI commanders at the Endowment were doing basic weapons training with at least some of the guards on the roof of the Endowment. Chaldean Bishop Jacques Isaac, the Dean of Babel College seminary, told Poloff that the new guards would eventually go to the MOI's police college for approximately three months of training. Once ready for duty, al-Naufali said, the new guards would take the place of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) personnel who have been assigned to guard churches since the bombings on July 12 (ref B). He thought this would be a positive development because the minority guards would know better than the ISF, who belonged in particular neighborhoods, and also because it would reduce friction between the ISF and church leaders, which has grown over the past two months.

16. (C) COMMENT: The GOI's decision to bolster the security presence at churches and other minority places of worship using personnel drawn from these communities, as well as providing body guards for senior minority religious figures, are tangible signs of its commitment to their safety and well being. The decision also provides Iraq's minority communities with a greater role in their own defense. At the same time, given the penchant of terrorist organizations to target Iraqi security forces, the minority communities will need to prepare themselves for the potential consequences of providing for their own security. END COMMENT.
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